

Chapter 3

“Wow,” Harvey claps her hands together loudly. “I am so grateful to see so many beautiful faces!” She climbs a few steps of the neon pink stair in the middle of the store and gains the crowd's attention easily. Her marketing company allowed her to take the lead on one of their campaigns for the athletic brand Lilly's Lemons. The entire summer she and Troy, her best friend, have worked hard to get as many attendees at their socials as possible. Their most successful events are their Tuesday run club with the chance of meeting at least three of their ambassadors, and their free pilates classes in the Lilly's Lemons London store. The leaders had looked at them like teachers unsure of how to tell their students the dance they wanted to perform for the class was too provocative when they told them about their ideas for the fitness classes. “*Their customers want to buy clothes,*” the bald, old men had said. “No,” Troy answered pressing the arrow on his keyboard, revealing the secret half of the PowerPoint. “*They want to feel good.*” And as if the second part of their routine involved jaw dropping tumblers and less grinding, the grey looking men had given them an ish reassuring nod and said, “*Okay, try.*”

“I'm really happy to announce our seventh pilates class here in Lilly's Lemons!” The crowd applauds. Lilly's Lemons store has a big, dark sales floor on the ground floor, with the sales rack being either white or the same hot pink color as the staircase. Second floor is smaller and carries the collection from the old season and basic black tights as well as a lemon water station, only open for these rare occasions. “As you know, Lilly's Lemons is a women's athleisure brand made to fit everyone in all sizes and encourages body positivity. I'm also excited to announce that today I've been allowed to add to my little speech that they are currently working on a men's and a gender-neutral line!” Troy woos extra loud in the back of crowd, encouraging the few men around him to do the same. They are all clad in mismatch bright colors in spirit of today's 80s themed class. Troy told Harvey to take care of half of his to-do list for the event, so he could ensure the two of them would have outfits verging on magic. A part of Harvey wanted to protest, but she'd much rather stay at work a couple hours longer than take another scolding like the one she got when she turned up with a white t-shirt and jeans to a White Party. Their tights are black, Lilly Lemon's basic section, and of course Troy has squeezed himself into a size smaller than her. And thread over they are wearing a chromatic blue leotard, with matching headbands.

“For our new attendees, the class is about forty-five minutes long. After that we have half an hour before the store opens to the public and your exclusive thirty percent discount runs out. To fuel ourselves after we will be serving a members-only lunch up at the rooftop restaurant right across the street. You are all welcome to join of course. And please invite any of your friends, all they have to do is pay twenty pounds for their meal and sign up to our newsletter. Any questions? No? Okay, take it away Marita!”

Harvey steps down and joins the front row, smiling widely at the ladies on her sides. Personally, she’s not a huge fan of these classes. Marita will make them do five-minute-long core circuits with no breaks and as one of the arrangers Harvey feels like she has to give it her all. Also, the store is displayed to the outside world with big glass windows, and everyone loves to look twice or even three times at the group of fifty having a fitness class in the middle of a store. *It’s all for the publicity*, she encourages herself as the iPhone cameras pop up while she’s shaking uncontrollably in what feels like the fifteenth plank of the class. And it works, and that’s all that matters, numbers of sales, members and likes on social media. The more numbers that are on her side, the more opportunities she will have come out of university and the better life she can create for herself. It’s all that matters.

“Ow, ow, ow. No Tina don’t worry. Harvey is getting me some ice now.” Troy waves his little crowd away with a kind smile. They have made their way up to the rooftop restaurant, and he slumps down on a couch overlooking the London skyline. There’s something comforting, and a bit chilly, being so high up over such a crowded city. Troy loves the rush of the city, it was like shot of adrenaline to his morning coffee, but it’s also numbing in the long run. It’s only in moments like these, when he remembers it is all just a big mess that he remembers he is just one tiny thing surrounded by a million other minions. The city traffic is distant up here, with only the occasional angry honk making it’s way all the way up. Troy draws a deep breath and leans his head back on the soft couch, tapping his fingers to distract himself from the pain pulsing through his groin. Shortly after Harvey comes over with a big bag of eyes and places it in his lap.

“Please be careful.” He groans from the weight of the bag.
“Sorry, here.” She says, hovering it lightly over his lap so he can adjust.

“Okay, slowly.”

She does as he says until her arms start to shake from lifting the heavy weight up and down and back and forth. “I’m sorry Troy, but this feels a bit weird.”

“Why?” He asks opening his eyes. “Yeah, you are oddly close to my balls.”

Harvey laughs as he still doesn’t move. “Yeah, so you can you take it?”

Troy lies it on the couch between them waking up a bit to everything going on between them. The rooftop is packed with their members still wearing 80s inspired athleisure wear, making the few normal customers look misplaced. Everyone is chatting happily, having private hauls with their big Lilly Lemons bags. Bonding over aching muscles and cute fitness outfits. He brings his attention back to Harvey, who looks stunning in the outfits he has made, except for her ponytail can be a bit funkier, but he doesn’t comment on it.

“You know if anyone should have a strong groin it should be me.” She doesn’t understand what he means. “I thrust a lot.”

“Trust?”

“*Thrust.*”

Harvey pauses at his words, as if checking if the food has gone off. “Thought you were bottom.”

He jolts forward at her words, flinching at the sudden movement. “Not recently. Don’t look now.” Thoroughly trained she locks her eyes on the skyline as if it is the most exciting site she has ever seen. Proudly Troy remembers a time when she immediately would have wacked her head around to look. Through closed lips he informs. “Remember the supervisor you hooked up with at the summer party.”

“Mustache guy?” She asks narrowing her eyes.

Troy stretches his neck long and casually scans the space around them, and just like he observed a bit earlier. The sleazy looking man, with pitch black, slick back hair and too clean eyebrows, looks as if he is planning to make his way over to them. “He’s by the finger food, and he keeps looking over here.”

A visible shudder goes through her, and something unknown, his mother instinct he guesses, makes him sit up straighter. “Put your arm over my shoulder, pretend you’re my boyfriend.” Harvey says, scooting towards him.

“Harv, we’re in matching leotards. It’s more likely that were a lesbian couple than me being your boyfriend.” Troy huffs and lets out a ragged laugh. “Shit, he’s coming over.”

“Fuck. Come on, stick your tongue down my throat, he can’t interrupt that.” She says hurried and takes his hands to pull him closer.

“Ew, but Harvey you’re a girl.” Troy takes his hands away as if there is not enough hand sanitizer in the world to make him touch her.

“Okay, then puff up your chest at least.” She swats his bony boobs, making him hunch back setting off more pain spreading out from his middle section. Accusingly he sets the icebag back in his lap. “Ow! Stop that, you know you’re freakishly strong.”

Harvey waves him off. “Oh, come on grow a pair.”

“I’m currently trying to take care of the once I have, thank you.” He says visibly adjusting the bag of ice in his lap. They scowl angrily at each other, like to angry children before he adds childishly. “Your admirer is here, hopefully he’s not scared by the sack of balls you call a chin.”

Harvey gapes at him. “Say I have a butt chin once more and I swear I will— Hi,” She turns in her seat revealing to him the marvelous back of the leotard that he had bedazzled with purple monochrome sequins. *They should sell that as a limited edition set*, he thinks, toying with his nametag soon saying, Troy Hazel, Marketing Intern/Designer.

“Oh, look at that, you grew a full beard.” Harvey tries to sound enthusiastic about the thin, black stubble, putting on the same charming smile as she does when she is presenting something. Troy holds back a laugh. When they first had gotten their internships in Connect they had both dreuled over Toby. Even discussing their jealousy over few five glasses of wine when he suddenly disappeared to the South of France for a few weeks and returned with a tan and a wide smile. Who is the mystery woman in his life? They pondered together, and realized when Harvey picked up the courage and spoke to him at the office summer party that there is no woman, only pride over having lounged in luxury at his

uncle's villa. Still, he had seemed like a handsome man, but now the tan is gone, his conversation repetitive and apparently penis tiny according to Harvey. Troy blames himself for pushing her on him, he had only checked out his feet and they had promised gold. His short sausage fingers however... It's safe to say the golden halo Toby had been wearing at the beginning of the summer is far gone.

"I'll tell you Harvey, the top floor are impressed with what you did with this event. Do you have any numbers for how many new members you got today?" Toby says in his nasal voice, casually taking a bite of the cocktail sausage on his plate making Troy shiver in disgust. *It's like he's eating his own fingers*, he thinks.

"I'm not sure yet," Harvey continues way nicer than Troy ever could. "But the turnout itself is pretty good. I think at least half have said they want to join the run club next week, so that's a start." She points to the packed venue. "Troy is a really good photographer, so we'll post those as quick as possible."

The mention of his name makes him sit up as if he's paying attention, but Toby only offers him a small nod. *Thank God*, he thinks revealed as the awkward silence grows signaling that the conversation is over, and Toby starts to look self-conscious staring down at his tiny sausages.

"Are you staying for the rest of the event?" It takes everything in him not to hit her. *Fuckssake!*

By the time the lingering conversation is over and Toby steps away with a smile beginning to look like the one he had coming back from France, Troy is frustrated and hungry. "I thought you didn't want to sleep with him again."

Harvey looks alarmed. "I don't"

"Then why did you offer to?" He asks sassily, pointing to the talk they just had.

"What?"

He reenacts what she was saying in a girly voice twiddling his imaginary hair.

"I was just trying to be nice." She says innocently and Troy shakes his head overexaggerated.

"Take this from me. Never be nice to anyone you've slept with, unless you want a promotion or to marry them." He gets off the couch to see if there is anything left of the finger food, or

if their lunch offer still stands now that the sun is about to set. The pulled muscles still hurt, but the acute ache down his thighs and in his lower belly has mildened.

“What happened to a woke twenty twenty-four?” Harvey asks walking with him. Most of their members have left and the new guests of the fancy restaurant look at them if they are hired performers in their monochrome outfits.

“It’s business babes, we will never learn.” Troy says tiredly, picking at some try pieces of watermelon.

“I think I need something stronger than those kombucha shots after that. I brought my flask; do you want some?”

“Girl, I thought you’d never ask.”

Under flashing neon lights Troy whips his head back and forth, morphing his body with the hectic techno beat. He has found himself a dance partner for the night, but every time he twirls his body around someone else, he has the relieving realization that he could never pick him out in a crowd. Actually, he might have lost him a few times already. He is brunette, right? A tall rugby player parts the crowd wearing a sparkling, silver top, Versace shades while sporting a rough mullet. Who is brunette did you say? Troy stumbles over slim ankles in his platforms and stumbles into the beautiful man’s chest. “I only realized this was Heaven when you walked in.” He shouts over the crowd, gaining a confused smile in response. The guy points to his ear.

“I can’t hear ya!” He shouts in a thick Manchester accent.

“Angel!” Troy points to his chest, realizing that the pink tint over the guy’s skin doesn’t come from the pink lights, but from a deep sunburn lingering from the summer. Proper British lad he thinks excitedly.

“Heaven!” He shouts back at him, pointing to one of the many signs of the club.

“Exactly,” Troy nods, leading his new favorite person in the room towards the bar.

An Avicii-remix comes on as they wait for their shots, drunkenly pointing to each other while dancing with weakened knees and unprecise moves. How he loves to be drunk, it’s like being made of jelly.

By the time Abba’s Man after Midnight comes on for the third time, Troy is ready to close the deal, but rugby man wants them to dance with his friends for longer. With a sigh he agrees and raises his arms above his head and woo’s excitedly, even though it has been an

hour since his last genuine 'woo'.

More faces flash past him in the strobe lights, mere snapshots that will disappear from his memory in seconds. The club is just one big room with a stage in the front, and like any other gay club it is always overcrowded and high energy. Troy pushes a hand through his sweaty curls and nods his head to the rhythm and the beat while swaying with the man of the night. Between bobbing heads he spots Harvey's crazy curls and waves widely to try and catch her attention, but she moves too quickly and Troy understands why when he sees Toby's slick hair follow two steps behind her.

He's still here? He thinks surprised. They tried shaking him off by coming here, there's no way Toby is actually okay bringing his spotless, no-iron shirts in here, moving between body glitter, sticky drinks and bare chests in leather jackets. Both Harvey and Troy kept their outfits on from the event earlier, if anything they fit the room better than anyone else. He even suggested for the bartender to let him onto the stage for a short performance, but Ryan sadly didn't agree with Troy's vision.

"I think me mates are leavin', wanna join?" The rugby player shouts down in his ear, and they share a knowing look through heavy, drunk eyelids of what he actually means.

Harvey waits patiently at the corner of the bar. The bartender spotted her five minutes earlier, but the drink isn't her main priority anymore. All she has done tonight is run zigzag over the dancefloor to try and lose Toby off her heels but no, he returns like an unfortunate infection because she never finished her antibiotics.

"You know, I didn't think this was your kind of club." He says coming up on her side, looking like he's scared of touching anyone around him. Harvey sighs annoyed at the sound of his voice, and waves at the bartender again. Maybe she does need a drink. "I have many sides."

"Oh yeah?" A horny flicker suggesting he again has other thoughts than her makes her push away from the bar.

"I just need a cigarette." The entrance is a crowded mess from the constant rush of people leaving and entering. She's not supposed to use it, but one of their friends in security has shown her the way to the backdoor only meant for staff. Usually, she only gets to use it if

she shares her weed, but it can't hurt to try. Quickly she pushes down the handle of a big grey fire door at the edge of the bar and hurries in. The backroom is only a loveseat, leather couch looking like something out of a porn. The white light feels like a sudden meeting with reality, after being showered in blinking neon. Her sneakers squeak against the laminate floor from her uneven steps. She rubs her throbbing temples. How much did she drink? "You smoke? I didn't know that." Toby's voice makes her jump. "You know, you shouldn't be here. It's staff only."

"You're not staff." He challenges.

"No, but I have friends here."

"Oh, so you have connections?" He continues playfully, somehow making her annoyance grow stronger.

She ignores him and continues down the dull corridor, unsure if they might already have passed by the door she's looking for. But turning around or stopping means getting closer to Toby, so she takes her chances on another way out appearing. She pushes a hand through her sweaty hair. "Toby. I think I just need some time on my own." His steps fastened into a light jog, and he reaches for her wrist. "London can be a scary place for pretty girls like you. I'll come, just to keep you safe." "I'm good." She tries to snap her arm back, but the alcohol has made her weak.

"You know, you seem a bit drunk. Maybe I'll walk you home." He says in a deeper voice, as if it makes him more of a man to offer his protection.

Harvey snorts like he just told the funniest joke. "No, I'm good." She stumbles as he rubs her shoulders.

"Or maybe it's easier if we just check into a hotel. I mean, you seem pretty drunk." His breath is warm against her breath. Harvey stops and swallows, spotting the back entrance a few feet ahead thinking it's her escape, only to realize it leads into an empty alley. *Fuck.* "No, I'm fine." She tries to sound as aggressive as possible, but it comes out way weaker than she wants to. "Toby I said I'm fine." The door comes closer as she repeatedly pushes his hands away, only for them to return more aggressively.

Toby laughs at her. "I'm just trying to protect you Harvey. Calm down."

“Get your hands off me,” she demands, feeling as his claustrophobic grip makes her heart pound like a hammer in her chest and whimper pathetically. “Let me go.”

“Oh, come on,” he says, nuzzling against her neck. “Don’t you remember how fun it was last time.”

“I said, GET OFF!” Finally, she reaches the door and fights his greedy hands off her one last time, pushing the heavy door open with her body. The metal hurts against her ribs but the weight disappears quickly as she stumbles into the cold air of the night. With a heartbeat pounding harder than the beat in the club she runs out of the dark alley and towards the warm lights of the street. The footsteps behind her are gone, but in disbelief she keeps up the pace for a few more streets constantly glancing behind her for the slick, sweaty man.

As her nerves settles, she slows down her pace having passed through several streets, taking lefts and rights at random to make sure he can’t find her. “Fuck, he’s gonna be mad on Monday.” She thinks annoyed with herself and even more furious with him. “Guess I’ll be the one to make the flyers again.”

She sighs and searches her bag for the cigarettes. Have they fallen out? She swore she put them in.

Tired and moody Harvey finds her way to the main street. The streetlights are more yellow than normal, but she likes how warming they feel, deceiving her into thinking the cold isn’t getting to her for a little while longer. *Maybe I should go back*, she thinks and rubs her arms, feeling the prickly goosebumps fight the thin fabric. She whips around to walk the way she came, realizing she’s slowly made her way up a hill. Something stings in her stomach. Where is she?

The street is wide and long, with cars parked tightly on either side. All bodyworks are angularly designed with sharp lines and bold headlights looking like actual lightbulbs that are screwed into the front of the car. It’s like she’s stepped into a vintage car parade. The street is quiet all Harvey can hear is the silent buzz from the occasional working streetlights and her own breath creating tiny frost clouds in the air. Put off her stroke she finds the familiar shape of her phone and finds Google Maps. No reception.

She clicks her tongue in disbelief. “You got to be kidding me.”

Harvey huffs as she continues down the street, her annoyance slowly turning to self-pity as the cold makes her fingertips go numb. "It's supposed to be August," she shouts up at the sky.

Finally, a couple walk in her direction, the first people she's seen since the club. The guy is balding with a thick crown of brown hair, but on top a few sad, long hair strands combed to hide the pale top of his head. He's in a black leather jacket with a wooly collar and jeans with a big belt buckle. The woman is in an oversized, ugly knitted sweater and her blonde hair is tied back in a boring ponytail with fluffy bangs to go with it. Harvey walks over to them, wobbling in her steps.

"I'm sorry, but could I bum a cigarette of you."

The couple exchange a questioning look, before the guy sighs and hands her a cigarette.

"Do you have?" She moves her thumb up and down to mimic a lighter.

The guy fishes a white lighter with a worn out aqua blue and pink 'Miami Vice' logo from his big pocket.

"Cool lighter," she lights her cigarette quickly and takes a drag. She coughs from inhaling the dry smoke but feels a sense of relief as it dulls down her shaking. "Oh actually, could I borrow one of your phones? Mine doesn't have any reception out here." She waves the phone as if useless. The woman makes an indignant sound. Harvey doesn't know how to interpret it, so she doesn't.

"I think your best bet is a telephone booth." The guy says in a tired voice and then they walk on, again leaving her confused and shivering in the empty night.

After what feels like hours of stumbling through the cold streets, her teeth chattering like Jack Nicholson's frozen head in the *Shining*. She spots one dodgy pub with its door open among closed corner stores, spilling out sour music and unrecognizable words. The warmth hits her even before she enters, like a fireplace to her cold limbs.

The dark wall to wall carpet is dusted and worn down, and the bar chairs are made of cheap, yellow wood, creaking under her weight as she stabilizes herself on the sticky surface of the bar. There's a familiar wide selection of spirits on the wall behind the bartender. He has a bristle beard and long, lightly curled hair, trying to make up for a slowly declining hairline. Harvey catches his attention, and he shares the same questioning look as the couple she met earlier. "Can I borrow your phone?"

The bartender shrugs and answers in a low voice, "Landline's down. Sorry, someone's coming to fix it next week. Can I get you anything to drink?"

Harvey pauses at his answer. *Landline?* "No, I mean your," she's about to take out her own phone again, but defeatedly decides not to and drops it back into her purse. "I'm good, thanks. I just need to warm up." She sends him a tired smile and he nods understandingly. "A coffee coming right up," he says giving her a wink and throwing the tea towel he's been pulling through his hands over his shoulder.

It's a small local pub with tall windows and tiny tables in all shapes and styles, giving a vintage vibe Troy would love on the days he just feels like blending in with the guys watching a football game. She looks around for a TV only to find a grey, chunky box hanging in the ceiling. *He will love it here;* she thinks overlooking the rest of the customers. A few men with beer bottles and bellies are gathered around a dartboard laughing among themselves. In the corner of the pub is a small stage where the sour tones are coming from. A guy in double denim and styled hair making him look like one of the members from Grease, is rocking his heart out on stage, sadly missing most of his chords. There are enough people in the bar to fill up all the seats, yet the tables in front of the stage are completely empty. Despite the lack of interest for his music they all applaud as his song comes to an end. Harvey joins in. A tall guy with wavy half length hair comes in putting his hands together louder than anyone else.

"You go dude," he cheers getting a proud reaction from his friend, making him announce his next self-written song with more power.

The guy comes up to Harvey, she watches quietly as he walks over.

"Sorry," he says pointing to the brown leather jacket hanging on the back of her chair.

It takes her a few seconds to realize. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to steal your seat." She starts to climb down.

"No, no, I'll sit here. I just need my jacket." The guy looks her up and down a bit to openly for Harvey's liking.

"Hey, stop that," she says covering herself. "Seriously, all night people have been looking at me like I'm some kind of alien, what's can possibly be so wrong with me?"

He holds his hands up in defence, completely neutral to her accusing tone. "It's just, it's November and you're in a leotard."

Harvey looks down herself, the goosebumps still fighting the thin fabric at the same time as

she realizes her nipples are also poking out. She catches the stranger looking as well and clears her throat embarrassed. "Oh, I— Wait, no it's not, it's au—" She stops herself and gazes around the room one more time. Men in washed out jeans, boots, few sneakers, leather jackets with fur, denim jackets, longer, volumes haircuts, mustaches, sideburns. The bottles behind the bar look like something she's seen before, but they all have the wrong etiquettes, dinosaur tv, no reception, no one has a phone, the old cars... "What time is it?" She asks slowly, regaining her focus on the tall figure before her, with hair like Patrick Swayze a big belt buckle on his jeans and a white shirt, unbuttoned down to his chest.

He flicks his wrist to check his leather watch matching his jacket.

Harvey shakes her head, "No, what year is it?"

The stranger cracks a smile, as if he can't understand what's come over her. "1989."

The colour drains from her face.